

SEA LETTER

Published by the San Francisco Maritime Museum

ALBERT W. GATOV, President KARL KORTUM, Director

Volume 5, No. 1, December 1967



The scow schooner *CHARLES W.* takes on hay upriver. Her boom and wheel are raised to accommodate the tiers of hay she will carry on deck. Courtesy History Division, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.

SCOW SCHOONERS of SAN FRANCISCO BAY

The Museum Displays a Relic of this Unique Type of Craft—the Stern of the *CHARLES W.*

The San Francisco Bay scow schooner, the workboat that was developed to carry bulk goods and produce on the Bay and its narrow and shallow tributaries, appeared on these waters even before the Gold Rush. By 1876, there were an estimated 250 of them in use, and as recently as the first few years of this century, the working scow-schooner fleet numbered about 200 or more. Perhaps a total of 400 scows were built around the Bay from 1849 to 1906. Of this number, only two examples of the scow schooner exist in the public eye today.

One is the ALMA, part of the small fleet of West Coast craft now on display at the Hyde Street Pier of the San Francisco Maritime State Historic Park. She is now masted and, painted her original white with a varnished rubrail, makes a pretty sight moored near the C.A. THAYER, an "outside portr" about ten times her size.

The stern of the scow schooner *CHARLES W.*, named for her owner Charles Waack, is the other visible relic of this

once numerous type of vessel. It is now restored and on display on the first floor of the San Francisco Maritime Museum. This section was saved, as Museum Curator Harlan Soeten tells on a following page, from disintegration on the banks of Dutchman Slough by a major effort of the Museum's staff.

The demise of the rest of the scow schooners is obscure, and largely unlamented when contrasted with that of a glorious windjammer. The obscurity of the fleet's end is in high contrast to the lively picture conjured up by the topical names of the scows in their heyday: ROUGH AND READY, HARVEST QUEEN, FOURTH OF JULY, BROADGAUGE, GAS-LIGHT, WAR EAGLE, DREADNAUGHT, NORTH BEACH, WITCH OF THE BAY. Their business: haulers of hay and grain, lumber, bricks, coal, sand and gravel, rock salt, shell, canned fruit and vegetables, potatoes, and any other cargoes that were moved to market in the days when water transportation was, if not the only, the most economical way, given



the hundreds of miles of navigable rivers, creeks and sloughs connecting San Francisco with the Central Valley and the hinterlands surrounding the bays.

What was the San Francisco Bay scow schooner? It was a flat-bottomed, centerboard schooner with a square bow and stern. It has been described by a deepwater sailor as "a big square box with sails set," although from the evidence of photographs and plans, this would seem a prejudiced judgment. Howard Chapelle, Curator of the Watercraft Collection of the Smithsonian Institution, further disputes it when he writes of sailing scows in general: "The sailing scows were often quite remarkable for their surprising weatherliness and turn of speed under sail. . . . Some had long, sweeping lines on side and bottom that also produced speed and steadiness on the helm as well. The large. . . .schooner-rigged scows were often smart sailors when light. . . ." (1)

Roger Olmsted, editor of *American West*, writes that this type of vessel appeared out of the need for navigating the surrounding waterways, where exceptional seaworthiness and high speed were not required for carrying bulk goods. The scow schooners were, he states, "cheap, strong and burdensome craft, which did the most work at the least cost." (2) He cites the *WAR EAGLE*, built in 1865 and still running in 1925, as the first example for which records exist of the San Francisco Bay scow schooner in essentially its final form.

Scows were built at San Francisco and at various points around the Bay at both shipbuilders and by amateurs. Among the most notable of the yards producing scows was that of Matthew Turner of Benicia, who built, among others, the *JENNIE AND EDNA* in 1884, the *SOLANO* in 1885, and the *PINOLE* in 1889. But the center of scow-building activity

Above: The Third Street Hay Wharf. Scow schooners unload in Third Street Channel—also called Channel Creek. On the other side of the creek is the Pope & Talbot lumber wharf. Out of sight to the left is Tietjen's saloon, where the hard-working scow schooner men bent an elbow between trips. Here, a burton man (right, in the white shirt), standing on the deckload, slacks a hay bale toward the waiting wagon. Photograph courtesy The Society of California Pioneers.

Below: The JAMES F. MCKENNA on the Sacramento River, bound for the Hay Wharf in San Francisco. Her sails are reefed up to accommodate the five-tier load of baled hay. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. A. Horstmeyer.



was Hunters Point in San Francisco, where the yards of Emil Munder and of "Pop" Anderson (now Anderson and Christofani) were the most prolific. Munder built the CHARLES W. for Charles Waack in 1905; three years earlier, Anderson had built the JAMES F. McKENNA for Waack's brother William. It was also at Hunters Point during the '80s, '90s, and early years of this century that the scows were usually hauled out for their annual spring bottom painting and repair.

Scow schooners are often referred to as "hay scows," and although hay was not their only cargo, it may have been their most picturesque one, with the five-high tiers of hay above the deck, the sails reefed up to accommodate it, and the man at the wheel on a raised pulpit so he could see over the load. Hauling hay was the chief occupation of the CHARLES W., although Charlie Waack extended his working season (April to the end of October for hay) by hauling other cargoes—sand or shell or canned goods.

The scow schoonerman's life was hard—get up the river with available wind and tide, pole or haul in harness when necessary, or run a line to a tree and winch up to it. At the landings the captain and his crew, one or two hands, loaded day and night until the scow was full, then waited on the tide and wind for the return trip to the Hay Wharf or other destination in San Francisco. The narrow and shallow rivers and sloughs and the strong tides and winds often made the sailing difficult, and the work of loading was not lightened by the summer heat of the upper reaches of the Sacramento River.

In the case of the man who owned his own scow, the reward was a comfortable income from an occupation on the water. If the glories of deepwater sailing were lacking, so were its miseries—long absences from home, poor pay for crewmen, and the dangers of the sea. Still, in the workaday routines of the little scow schooners, there were the hazards of getting stuck on the banks of a narrow slough, when trying to tack at night, collisions, beats to windward up narrow channels, the lack of dependable winds in wintertime and, certainly not least, the possibility of getting hit on the head with a hunk of coal in a hot battle with another scow schoonerman for right of way up Petaluma Creek.

A few of the scows and their owners brought some gla-

mour to this routine when, with neighbors and friends from Butchertown in outing finery, they set sail on annual spring excursions, when their boats had just been painted, for Paradise Cove or some other likely picnic spot around the Bay. And the scows figured in the renowned Fourth of July races staged by the Master Mariners Benevolent Association, competing strenuously for the "Champion" banner, and arousing considerable betting on the sides. According to Roger Olmsted, the 60 foot scow schooner ROSELLA was one of two vessels (the other was a "plunger," a type of catboat rig) ever to win permanent possession of the coveted banner, for its victories in its class in 1869, 1870 and 1871. He notes that "in many cases scows defeated yachts, which sometimes entered the regattas, even though they could not compete for the flags. . ." (3) These Fourth of July races, in which interest fell in the '80s, were revived in the early days of this century, and both Charles and William Waack raced their scows on that holiday.

After about 1910, the sailing scows were rapidly being converted to motor propulsion. This required little alteration—the foremast and boom were left in place, and the original steering gear and tackle were used. The scow might be cut down, if its length exceeded 65 feet, to avoid the legal necessity of having a licensed engineer aboard after it became a motor vessel. A variety of suitable marine engines, manufactured in San Francisco, were not prohibitively expensive.

The installation of a marine engine marked the end of the sailing scow, but it was the building of good roads and the development of dependable trucks that did in water transport around the Bay. By 1930, even the motorized scows were in a decline from which they never recovered.

—Anita V. Mozley

(1) Howard I. Chapelle, *American Small Sailing Craft*, N.Y., W.W. Norton, 1951, p. 33.

(2) Roger R. Olmsted, *The Scow Schooners of San Francisco Bay, 1849-1949*, M.A. Thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1955, p. 18.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 55.

FOUR VIEWS of CHARLIE WAACK, the "CHARLES W." and THEIR TIMES:

VOLNEY FRENCH, ex-scow schooner man,
Alviso, California:

"Did you ever hear of a navigating pole? Most of the scows carried navigating poles, and they were about 20 feet long, good light wood. That's what you had to use to shove yourself along or into the bank. They were just a pole you stuck in the bottom and pushed, but that's what everybody called them—navigating poles.

"When the scow schooners were in Third Street channel there was heavy drinking. They were famous for it. They were hard-working guys. Charlie Waack, I think he carried a thousand bales of hay, and they used to figure on getting up there, upriver, in the afternoon, get the hold loaded that night, finish off the next day, and then sail back.

"A thousand bales—they had to take them off the levee. They really worked. They just worked until they were loaded. The sea breeze comes up in the afternoon, and they'd go up

with that. And they'd get the hold loaded on the evening of arrival, and finish the next day. One day—a whole scow-schooner cargo. Then they'd go down again the following afternoon with the breeze. They figured on making a trip a week up there.

"CHARLES W. discharged at Third Street, or sometimes at the other side of Hunters Point—up in there. But mostly it was at dairies far down on the other side of Hunters Point. There was a wharf down there at what we call Washerwoman's Bay. A lot of the scow schooners anchored there in the winter when there wasn't anything doing. About all some of them carried was hay. A bunch of the scow men had wives or friends there, and they'd anchor there, at what is now Candlestick Park.

"There was a three-man crew total when loading the CHARLES W. Charlie always had two men besides himself. He himself ran the boat. He was skipper and first mate. The cooking was done by one of the hands.

continued on page 5

CHARLIE WAACK and
the "CHARLES W."—1895 - 1966



1895: Two San Francisco Bay scow-schoonermen sit for their portrait. William Waack, standing, had the scow schooner JAMES. F. MCKENNA built in 1902; in 1904 Charles Waack, right, had the CHARLES W. built. The brothers were born in Germany and after service in the Navy went to sea in merchant vessels. Charles arrived in San Francisco in 1887 at the age of 21, and was joined a year later by William. Known as hard workers and good navigators, the Waack brothers remained on the Bay and in scow schooners for the rest of their working lives. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Arend Horstmeyer, San Mateo.



1904: Charles Waack stands above the builders of his scow, the CHARLES W., at Emil Munder's yard at Hunters Point.



Ca. 1910: Charles Waack, left, and his friends ready to set off on the annual spring excursion of the CHARLES W. The company picnicked at Paradise Cove or McNear's Point, where they might stay overnight. Photograph courtesy of Wheeler A. Johnson, San Francisco.

1925: Motors were installed in the CHARLES W. around 1916; the tall, white-painted house was built later. Part of the original house is visible near the deck to the left. The last of the scow's many occupations was hauling asphalt. The tall house afforded, as did the earlier raised pulpit, a view for the helmsman over the load.



1955: By now the CHARLES W. was beached at Dutchman Slough in the San Joaquin delta country. Her bow transom had been sliced open to accommodate a marine railway for hauling out small craft. The old scow schooner was thus altered to a cross between a floating drydock and a World War II landing craft with bow ramp. Roger Olmsted, then Curator of the Museum, rows up for a look. Karl Kortum photograph.

1966: Boat builder and shipwright Dean Stephens adzes a timber while repairing the stern section of the CHARLES W.

"I didn't have many men as deckhands on the CHAMPION. Hans Beck and I ran it most of the time. There was a mess of those sailors around Third Street, and they all had nicknames. There was 'Bedbug' and 'Russian' John—he had the ANNIE, he owned it. There was a bunch of Danes, lived down in Minna Street—'Little' Niels and 'Big' Niels and others. I forgot the nicknames. When my uncle, Jack Ortley, who owned the CHAMPION, needed a man, he got one from there.

"But Charlie Waack, he picked his men. He knew the waterfront. He'd get a good worker. He was hell on wheels, that guy—both them brothers were. They'd kill 'em off if they couldn't take it. Load up in daytime and sail half the night. That was an awful grind."

HANS BECK, ex-scow schooner man,
Hillsborough, California:

"It was named after Charlie Waack. There were two young Germans came from Germany. There was Charlie Waack and his brother Billie Waack. One had the CHARLES W. and the other had the JAMES F. McKENNA. They were around the Bay all their lives. They were hard-working boys and marvelous navigators. Particularly as far as getting through all the river below Walnut Grove and down to Rio Vista. There were trees on both sides. You could just come around—tack—and come around immediately again, or your bowsprit would be caught amongst the trees. I did that often. You stick your nose in between two trees—you got to take the sails down. The old river between Walnut Grove and Rio Vista. That was a tough one.

"And I saw Charlie Waack, he was coming along with the CHARLES W.—it was marvelous the way he could do it. The way he could get her around on the new tack every time without getting her tangled in any of the trees—a pitch dark night! Imagine—you can't see any water—the trees shadow it from both sides. He passed me at night one time—I was being very careful. I was coming down empty in the DORA. Sometimes we didn't get any hay.

continued on page 6



"There was hard work on the CHARLES W. They were amazing men for work. Charlie Waack was down there in the bar until he was ready to go out again. He never went home. But Billie Waack, he didn't drink. Charlie was the drinker—around the hay wharves at Third and Berry—outside the Bridge.

"They had a boom over the dock. All they had to do was hook onto the bales and the horse pulled them up. And the drivers piled them on the wagon. We had a stopper line on the boom to hold it so it wouldn't swing back. When the horse walked off, the hay landed on the wagon.

"Most of the scows there were in the Thompson-Collier fleet. They worked hard to get to the landing first. Any way they could do it—sometimes sailing, bucking the tides when the wind was strong. You get right up alongside that levee, you get to the landing first, you start to unload and the other ones just have to sit there and look at you. This is at upriver landings. There was lots of competition. Same way coming back. Usually it was competitive, personally. A matter of one man wanting to be better than the other.

"There were a few captains who weren't like this. Some were religious men. They would anchor in the Bay in the middle of a Sunday morning, put on their dress suits and sit there and read their Bibles. They wouldn't do another stroke until the sun was down.

MRS. AREND HORSTMAYER, neice of Charles Waack,
San Mateo, California:

"Charles Waack came here on a sailing ship in 1887, and when he left it, he went to the waterfront. He didn't want to go back to sea, and he found someone who spoke German aboard one of these small schooners he ran across. The man gave him a job. Then a year later, when his brother, William Waack (my father), arrived, there was a job waiting for him aboard the DORA, the scow that was owned by Gus Reich, the German to whom my uncle had first spoken.

"Both my uncle and my father owned some small scows shortly after they came here. Then in 1902 my father had the JAMES F. McKENNA built for him by Anderson, and Charlie Waack had the CHARLES W. built by Munder in 1904.

"When my father built the McKENNA, my uncle said, "Oh, that's too big—you'll never get enough hay to load it." And that's why this McKenna, the weighmaster, said, 'If you name the boat after me, I'll get you work.' Well, my father said he never got him any work, but he never needed it anyway."

"My father and Uncle Charlie never sailed together. They always had separate boats, even in the days when they had small ones. Probably there wasn't enough money to support two of them. When they worked, though, they worked all day and night. They loaded hay during the day up the Sacramento River—those big bales weighed about 200 pounds. They slid them down and had to bump them to where they would be stowed.

"Two men worked for them—one man was the cook, the other was a hand. They both worked the scow, but you had to be sure that one of them could cook!

"The earthquake completely destroyed our house in San Fran-

cisco, so after that the whole family, my mother, father, brother and myself, lived aboard the McKENNA until we were able to find a house.

"We loved the boat. My father and Uncle Charlie had excursions on their scows every spring. They had big picnics, and sometimes we stayed overnight at McNear's Point, and we slept down in the hold, all our neighbors and friends. We also went over to Paradise Park—there was a dance pavilion down there. Everybody just loved to go—I have friends who still talk about it.

"We cooked aboard—the galley was in back of one of the staterooms. The CHARLES W. was quite similar. The cabin, where we ate, was quite spacious—a table that could seat six in captain's chairs. Under the stairs that came down from the stern there were big cupboards where we stored groceries. A fancy kerosene lamp hung over the table."

"When my father and uncle came here, much of their social life was with the German community. There were dances at Saratoga Hall, where my father met my mother. They belonged to a German lodge, and my uncle belonged to a singing group. He loved to dance, and my father said he always had all the good-looking girls. He was a friendly, outgoing man—he was always 'Uncle Charlie' to everyone in our neighborhood."

WHEELER A. JOHNSON, son-in-law of the last owner
of the CHARLES W., San Francisco, California:

"Charlie Waack—he was a great big man, maybe two-hundred and fifty pounds, huge hands. But he used to put ships in bottles, just the same . . . "

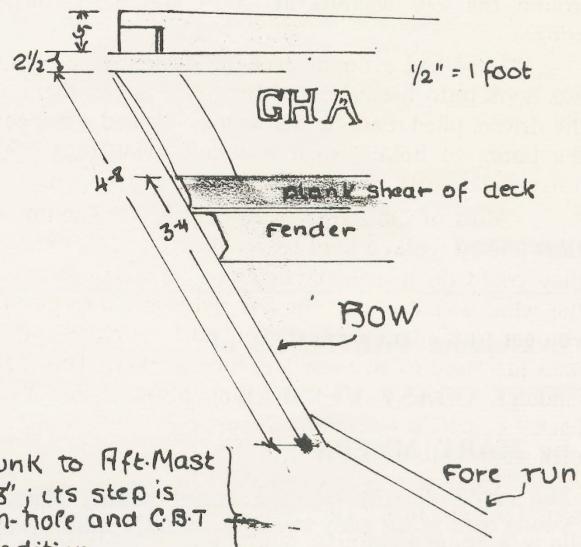
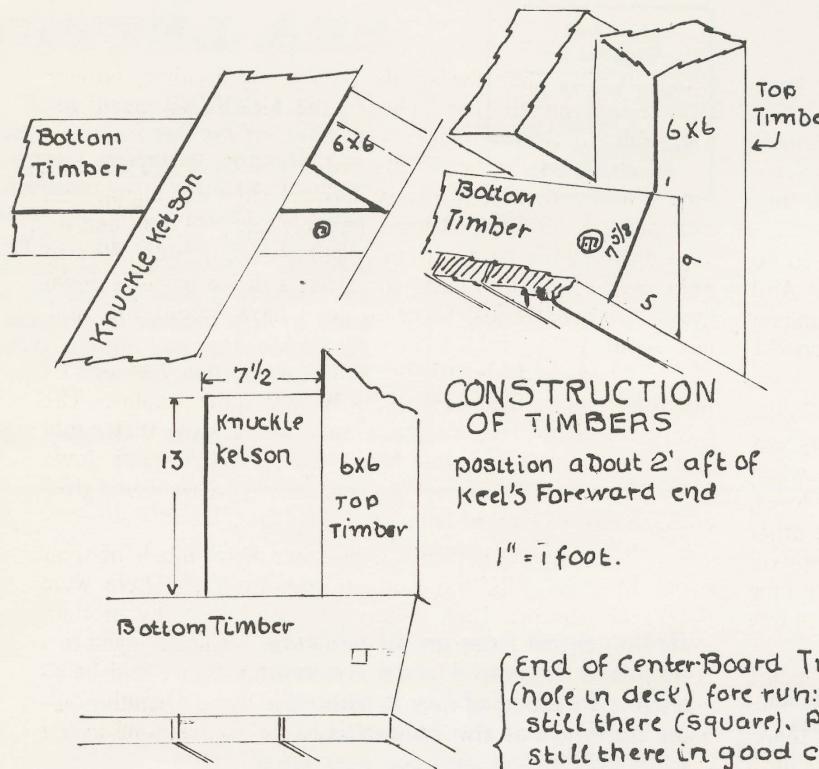


Munder's Yard at Hunters Point, ca. 1899. One of the many scows produced by Munder is hauled out. Mrs. Munder, mother of the builder of the CHARLES W., is in the foreground. William Olsen Collection, San Francisco Maritime Museum.

CHARLES W.

HAY SCOW

80 ft. 20.5 x 27 x 6.0



This drawing of sections of the CHARLES W. was made at Hunters Point in 1936 by the well-known San Francisco painter Otis Oldfield. The drawing is just one of many that Mr. Oldfield made in the late '20s and '30s of the deserted

scows in their resting places around the Bay. His compilation of information about these vessels, with measurements taken from the scow itself, surely constitutes the most detailed pictorial study of them extant.

The SALVAGE and RESTORATION of the STERN of the "CHARLES W."

The San Francisco Maritime Museum had known for several years that the remains of the scow schooner CHARLES W. were rotting away on the banks of Dutchman Slough in the San Joaquin delta country. We had always intended to save some part of this sailing craft unique to San Francisco Bay, and the finding of the exceptional stern view photograph (reproduced on page one) in the files of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History provided the impetus to undertake the considerable task of cutting off the entire stern section, hauling it to the museum, restoring it as necessary, and setting it up as a major exhibit.

The first step was to determine who owned the hulk. With the help of the Contra Costa Sheriff's office and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, we established that the CHARLES W.'s document had not been renewed since 1956, that no one claimed to be her owner, and that she was resting on county property.

With this important matter resolved, Bill Bartz, manager of the Museum's ship BALCLUTHA, and two of his men went to the site with, among other tools, a large gasoline-driven chain saw. The entire stern section was sawed off just aft of the cabin and floated downstream to a boat marina that boasted a crane of capacity sufficient to hoist it out of the water. On the following day, the stern was hoisted aboard a rented flatbed truck, hauled to San Francisco, and temporarily landed in an unused drive adjacent to the Museum building.

The Museum's front doors, including casings, transoms, and pillars, had to be removed before the Sheedy Drayage Company could move the 16 ft. by 10 ft. by 8 ft. section into the building and in place against the east wall of the first floor.

Once in place, the section required a month of careful restoration work. This was done by Dean Stephens, a shipwright and boat builder of Sausalito. Stephens fitted large

timbers inside the stern for additional support where it had been cut from the hull. Some previous owner had cut a 2 ft. by 2 ft. hole through the transom (apparently to facilitate the discharge of sand and gravel cargoes), and the rudder, three sizeable pieces of gunwale, and about one-third of the deck were missing. Also, several pieces of side planking were rotted out where they joined the transom. These damaged or missing pieces were repaired or replaced with old weathered timbers found in the bottom of a marine railway in an abandoned Sausalito shipyard.

The steering gear (including the forged iron tiller, tiller ropes, steering harp and steering wheel) was returned to the original direct arrangement typical of the scow schooners, and, finally, the portion of the scow's name, C H A R L E S W., that had been destroyed when the hole was cut through the transom, was redrawn and carved into the replacement timber.

Generally speaking, the Museum follows a policy of the less restoration the better, and this was our guide in restoring the stern of the CHARLES W. With some exceptions, we strive to present artifacts in the condition in which we receive them. When a part is missing and must be replaced to complete an exhibit, we attempt to use old material, or we might "tone down" the replacement part, but we do not try to exactly duplicate the appearance of the original. In this way the new part does not detract from the overall appearance of the artifact, and close inspection will show that which is original and that which has been added during restoration.

This was the way we treated the stern of the CHARLES W., now on display on our first floor with the 4 ft. by 5 ft. enlargement of the photograph from the Los Angeles County Museum, which shows the scow at its typical work-loading bay at an upriver landing. —Harlan Soeten, Curator

SAN FRANCISCO MARITIME MUSEUM

At the Foot of Polk Street, San Francisco 94109

Non-Profit
Organization

U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
San Francisco, Calif.
Permit No. 7496

return guaranteed

SEA LETTER

SEA LETTER is sent to all members of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, a private, nonprofit historical society. The museum is supported almost entirely by its ship BALCLUTHA, at Pier 43, and by its members. Interested non-members are cordially invited to join the museum to help support its program of the preservation and display of Pacific Coast maritime history.

—Anita V. Mozley, Editor

**Exhibition: PAINTINGS of
WEST COAST VESSELS**

by MARK MYERS

The extraordinarily talented marine painter Mark Myers, a young man in his early twenties, recently spent his senior year at Pomona College in an independent study of ships. Out of his research came a series of oil and watercolor paintings and a number of pen drawings of West Coast-built and owned vessels and of foreign vessels that traded on this coast. A selection of this work is now displayed in the Steamship Room on the Maritime Museum's first floor.

Myers, whose experience includes first-hand knowledge of deepwater sail as well as extensive library research into ship types and their characteristics, has been drawing and painting ships for some years, and has generously let the Museum use his work on letterheads and stationery, as well as for display. The present exhibition includes such scenes as the barkentine LAHAINA loaded with sugar entering the Bay, while a scow schooner coasts off Alcatraz, and the four-masted schooner COMMERCE is outward bound. Another oil painting shows the pilot schooner GRACIE S. (later well-known as Sterling Hayden's WANDERER) and the Matthew Turner-built Tahiti packet GALILEE off Point Reyes. Also included in the exhibition is a series of seven pen drawings that depict various West Coast ships, from the tiny STAR OF OREGON of 1841 to the five-masted schooner VIGILANT, completed in 1920.

In a statement accompanying the exhibition, Myers says: "Each of the ships portrayed represents a whole fleet of vessels which share some similarities with her. . . . For example, the S.N. CASTLE's portrait should tell you how vessels of her type were rigged (and there were about 50 barkentines built out here) and sailed, how sugar ships were designed, what weather conditions they might be likely to experience, how much of their cargo they carried on deck. . . ."

The Maritime Museum is proud to present these handsome examples of Mark Myer's work, and cordially invites members to view them. The exhibition, from which paintings may be purchased, will remain on view into the New Year.

Below, detail from an oil painting by Mark Myers: A scow schooner with a deckload of hay is framed by the bows of the barkentine LAHAINA, left, and the four-mast schooner COMMERCE, right. The painting is one of the selection of Myers' work currently on display at the Maritime Museum.



*The Museum Staff extends warm greetings
to its members at this holiday season,
and best wishes for the coming year.*